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ABSTRACT

A study examined policies addressing minority student retention in higher education at the national, state, and institutional level in order to clarify how the discourse surrounding minority student retention in higher education is related to social and political purposes and existing power arrangements. The study proceeded by critically examining two documents issued by national groups, reports issued by state level educational bodies in Arizona and Texas, as well as reports prepared by the University of Texas at Austin and by the University of Arizona. For each set of documents representing either the national, state, or institutional level the study looked at the following questions: (1) Who is authorized to speak on minority student retention? (2) Who listens? (3) What can be said? (4) What remains unspoken? (5) Which metaphors, modes of argumentation, explanation, and description are valued? and (6) Which ideas are advanced as foundational to the discourse? This content analysis of retention policies found that the policies leave intact a fundamental ideology of cultural deficit and disadvantage and support existing power arrangements. The analysis also found that policy reports address the same topics, use similar metaphors, advance the same ideas as foundational to the discourse, and fail to acknowledge racism. Included are 30 references. (JB)

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HOW POLICY MAKERS ADDRESS MINORITY STUDENT RETENTION: WHOSE INTERESTS ARE BEING SERVED?

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ASSOCIATION FOR THE STUDY OF HIGHER EDUCATION

This paper was presented at the annual meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education held at the Park Plaza Hotel & Towers in Boston, Massachusetts, October 31-November 3, 1991. This paper was reviewed by ASHE and was judged to be of high quality and of interest to others concerned with the research of higher education. It has therefore been selected to be included in the ERIC collection of ASHE conference papers.

Introduction

Implementing effective strategies for minority student retention is a national concern. Minority student retention is an increasingly important issue at colleges and universities in the United States. Much of the higher education literature for minority student retention has been appropriated from the assimilation/integration literature about mainstream students. In many ways this literature has failed to address minority student retention as a distinct issue.

This research contributes to the elimination of this gap by examining policy documents which discuss minority student retention. Reports which address minority student retention usually reflect the stated goals of national, state, and institutional policies. We examine in this paper the relationship of policies in each of these arenas in order to describe how the interests of minority students currently are being addressed.

The Statement of the Problem

Minority student retention studies are not significantly altering retention rates. Most of these studies, which discuss the retention of minority students in institutions of higher education, have generally not addressed how national, state and institutional policies address minority student retention. This research is critically examining the issue of retention of minority students in three policy arenas-- national, state, and institutional--in higher education in the United States.

The attention given to minority student retention reflects an ever increasing national concern for the paucity of minority student graduates at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. This research by focusing specifically on how policy makers address minority student retention may contribute insights to increase the participation and success of minority students

in American higher education. We link the conceptual framework of retention to reports which address minority student retention policies and practices.

Background

Studies of minority student retention occupy a prominent place in the study of contemporary higher education. Massive demographic shifts in the American population are occurring and will continue to occur well into the 21st Century. The impact of these shifts is already effecting the ethnic and cultural compositions of elementary and secondary schools. At the college level, the impact of these shifts is also manifest.

> The combined proportion of American Indians, Asians, Blacks, and Hispanics inside academe grew steadily, reaching a plateau in 1975 when at least one-third of the Black, White, and Hispanic 18 to 24 year old high school graduates enrolled in college. But while the numbers of minority students attending college increased, so did the number of those dropping out (Proctor, 1988).

> Black and Hispanic students are far less likely than non-minority students to complete a degree (Green, 1989).

Retention studies have primarily examined student variables that impinge on student success, e.g. social integration, academic integration (Tinto, 1975; Christie & Dinham, 1990), involvement (Astin, 1985), and rites of passage (Van Gannep, 1960). Ogbu (1989) examines the influences of community forces on minority student persistence and achievement.
Other recent studies (Viri,1989; Tierney, 1991) propose that the integrationist theories of student retention are irrelevant to understanding culturally specific aspects of minority student persistence and, in effect, deflect attention away from and may prevent institutions from examining other variables.

The interest in student retention has also been embedded in the literature on student

attrition. These propositions have been developed into complex explanations which propose that students' level of commitment to the goal of completing a degree, and to their institutions, ultimately determine their persistence.

In addition to the pervasive and dominating themes of integration and involvement, the "academic unpreparedness" of minority students has become a recurring theme in the literature (Fields, 1988; King, 1990; Hughes, 1987; von Destinon, 1989).

Other minority student retention themes include the reluctance to seek help (Billson and Brooks-Terry, 1987), overrepresentation of first-generation college students in attrition rates (Skinner and Richardson, Jr., 1988), lack of "institutional fit" (Hartley, 1987), non-caring faculty (Arnold et al., 1987), and the lack of faculty and administrator role models (Fields, 1988).

Our Approach

The mainstream discourse on student persistence just described has not addressed (but in fact ignored) the impact of policy discourse on minority student persistence.

Even the well published authors of the integrationist doctrine recognize the limitation of this ideology when applied to minority students (Tinto,1986) and call for the application of these theories in innovative ways to address minority student retention. Rhoades (1990) provides a model for content analysis as an alternative approach to analyzing higher education policy: he analyzed the discourse employed by college administrators when talking about undergraduate education. Tierney (1991), in a similar manner, deconstructs interviews he conducted with administrators regarding minority student persistence. He finds their discourse essentially

"reinforced the theoretical arguments of the social integrationists" and reiterates the "problem" as being student centered.

Much of the literature on retention generally regards the minority student as ill equipped to integrate fully in the academic and social life of higher learning. How institutions of higher education learn to integrate or assimilate their minority students, how and what policy makers communicate through written policies about minority student retention may reveal compelling insights about the nature of minority student retention.

Framework and Methodology

National, state and institutional policies generally reflect common goals. Policies at one level tend to influence the formulation of policies at other levels serving a self-legitimizing function. However, implementation practices and accountability are largely left to individual institutions. Our readings show how policies at various levels attempt to define successful practices in minority student retention.

This study examines policies addressing minority student retention at three levels -- national, state, institutional. Two reports for national audiences are included as well as policies created at the state level in two Southwestern states, Arizona and Texas. Institutional reports regarding minority student retention were selected from the public AAU member institutions, the University of Arizona and the University of Texas at Austin, in each of the two states.

A critical reading of these policy reports reveals how the discourse surrounding minority student retention in higher education is related to social and political purposes and existing power arrangements. These power structures influence, shape, produce, and are reproduced by policy

makers.

Cherryholmes (1988) challenges the prevailing structuralist approach of much educational discourse and operates under the premise that the discourse is governed by ideology and power. Educational discourse practice is governed by laws and rules which serve the ideological values and interests of existing power structures, "Discourses dominant in a given historical period and geographic location determines what counts as true, important, or relevant, what gets spoken, what remains unsaid" (p.35).

Ongoing discourse practice determines the hierarchy of subjects (those who may speak) and objects (what may be spoken about). By maintaining existing power relationships, those in control limit access to discourse. Those who are spoken about in educational discourse often are kept silent. For example, the arenas of policy discourse on minority student retention are seldom accessible to minority students themselves.

The critical pragmatic approach advocated by Cherryholmes "repeatedly interrogates texts and discourses-practices, keeping an eye out for contradictions and incompleteness between what is claimed and what is actually done" (p.94). This challenges the vulgar pragmatic approach which "pursues efficiency without criticism" and "promotes the advantage of those who are already advantaged while rhetorically claiming to aid those who are disadvantaged" (p.152).

Cherryholmes offers a series of questions that challenge normative educational discourse practice and the structure of authoritative knowledge. We applied six of his questions and applied them to the policy documents we chose for analysis:

-who is authorized to speak on minority student retention?
-who listens?
-what can be said?
-what remains unspoken?

-which metaphors, modes of argumentation, explanation, and description are valued?
-which ideas are advanced as foundational to the discourse?

We answer these questions through analysis of discourse which consisted of deconstructing the narratives in order to contextualize more fully what the policies suggest. For example, when referring to minority students: Do the policies use language that conceptualizes these students as problematic? When speaking of resource allocations do the informants consider minority programs as special add-ons to state allocations and institutional budgets? How do they express the benefits of minority student retention? Do these benefits accrue to the individual, the institution, to the state? How? To serve whose purposes? What is the sense of optimism or pessimism about minority programs in general and specifically at the institutions examined? What political agenda is being served by minority student retention programs? These statements reflect the line of inquiry that is being taken with the policy and report data.

Access to discourse surrounding minority student retention is controlled by the interests and institutions of the dominant culture and these institutions use that access to serve their own ends and legitimate their existence. The meanings, values, and preferences of the authors representing the dominant culture are applied and organized as action, belief, and lived experience for minorities.

Why Arizona and Texas

Arizona and Texas were selected for analysis because they both are states with rapidly increasing minority populations. By the year 2000, population estimates indicate that approximately 50% of public school enrollments in these two states will be comprised of minority students. Currently the majority of college age minority students in Arizona and Texas,

traditional and non-traditional, are enrolled in two year institutions, and of those that enroll in four year institutions retention rates range from 2% to 10% at the undergraduate level.

Arizona and Texas are both border states but differ greatly in population, the availability and distribution of state resources for higher education, and size of the higher education system.

THREE LEVELS OF ANALYSIS: NATIONAL, STATE, INSTITUTIONAL

National Level

Who is Authorized to Speak?

Both **Educating One-Third of a Nation** (1989) and **Focus on Minorities: Trends in Higher Education Participation and Success** (1987) were developed by well-established educational policy making groups; the former by the American Council on Education (ACE) Committee on Minorities with the sponsorship of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) and the latter by James Mingle with the Education Commission of the States (ECS) and the State Higher Education Executive Officers (SHEEO). The ACE Committee is made up of university and college administrators and association executives who met to "help higher education leaders identify special needs of minority students and define programs, policies, and practices that will help increase minority participation" (p.vii). ECS and SHEEO are nationwide affiliations of state-level education officials and board members. Their joint document was produced "to focus on the importance of the states in achieving the full participation of minorities" (p.v). All of the organizations involved here are well-known and maintain positions of prominence in the national discourse about issues concerning education.

Who Listens?

The impact of the two reports designed for a national audience is difficult to determine. Neither of these documents is in a position to mandate compliance. Whether the contents of the documents influence state and institutional practice is difficult to determine. They are not referred to in either the state or institutional policy documents. **Educating One-Third of a Nation** is designed to encourage "all sectors of society" and "receive broad-based campus support." How its message is disseminated and received is unstated and therefore cannot be easily assessed.

Focus on Minorities is designed for leaders serving in state government and on state boards. The authors of this report and its intended audience are in positions to impact state-level policy. The extent to which this report affects actual policy, again, cannot be readily examined.

What Can Be Said?

Both **Educating One Third of a Nation** and **Focus on Minorities** address the needs of American society as a whole. They tie participation of minority students in education to the nation's economic interests,

> As our nation ages rapidly, we are becoming economically dependent on a smaller, less skilled, and less prepared minority youth population" (**Educating One-Third of A Nation**, p.7).
>
> The result (of the lag in minority participation) is a growing segment of our population that is effectively removed from contributing productively to the life of the nation" (**Focus on Minorities**, p.8).

Providing a list of campus minority student recruitment and retention programs is a strategy used by **Educating One-Third of a Nation**. In most cases these plans are in the development and implementation stages and therefore there is little evidence or discussion of their success. The claim here that,

> Each campus needs a comprehensive plan spearheaded by the leadership, created through a fair and effective process, and owned by the entire campus" (p.9),

is fairly standard, unprovocative policy rhetoric.

Both reports use demographic information as their departure point in discussing minority student participation in higher education. It is clear in each case that the report authors found demographic information to be the most useful in legitimating minority student participation and retention as an issue for public policy discourse. **Educating One-Third of a Nation**, implied in its title, finds most salient that minorities will comprise one-third of the nation's population by the year 2000 and will be the majority in the school population of many major cities.

Focus on Minorities relies more heavily on demographic data. Many figures and tables cite United States population trends, high school graduation rates, college participation rates, numbers of degree recipients, and other information all by ethnic categories. In both cases, it is clear that the report authors found demographic information to be the most useful in legitimating minority student participation and retention as an issue of public policy discourse.

It is also appropriate in this avenue to attribute blame, deserved or not, for the lack of success by minority students in education. It is at the institutional level where these problems are manifest. Teaching, institutions that do not practice what they preach, student segregation, and white racism are noted as barriers to the retention of minority students. Preparation programs in elementary and secondary schools also are portrayed to share in the failure rates of minority students. The unpreparedness of minority students permeates the educational policy discourse to such an extent that it is almost universally accepted as a given.

What Remains Unspoken?

With the exception of the mention of financial aid programs, monetary resources directed

at the issue of minority student retention are generally undiscussed. In vague terms, the reports say that programs are "poorly funded" and that institutions need to "devote sufficient resources" without elaborating on specific sources of or uses for these funds.

The role of the federal government, except as the source of financial aid dollars, is largely unaddressed by the reports. **Focus on Minorities** states that "there is enough work to go around to all partners" and includes the federal government but continues,

> Our neglect of the federal policy issues in this study and in other companion studies by ECS and SHEEO does not reflect a conclusion that the federal government is no longer an important respondent in this area. Rather, it reflects our desire to direct recommendations at ourselves, not others (p.33).

That the federal government has not promulgated policies, and in some ways dismantled policies, to reverse the trend of educational failure among minority populations is avoided in these documents.

Which metaphors, modes of argumentation, explanation, and description are valued?

There are several metaphors and modes of argumentation, explanation, and description which permeate **Educating One-Third of a Nation** and **Focus on Minorities**. One of the most important metaphors is survival. The notion of survival applies more to society and institutions and less to individual survival. As was alluded to earlier, this ties to America's labor needs. Phrases like "economic necessity" and "social and economic dissolution that will affect us all" and statements such as,

> Our workforce must be prepared, disciplined, and self-motivated. We cannot support a huge percentage of our population that is non-productive, unemployable, and untrainable (**Educating One-Third of A Nation**, p.8),

do not suggest that institutions of higher education should encourage minority participation merely because it is the right thing to do.

The perpetuation of accepted beliefs about gain in individual economic opportunity is another metaphor valued by these reports:

> **One-Third of a Nation** urges all sectors of society to promote opportunities for people with color so that, within 20 years, social and economic indicators will reveal that the minority population has attained a standard of living as high as that of the White majority (p.vii).

> The success of minorities in higher education is important to us all. For individuals, education remains the vehicle for the American dream; for the nation, the means to a more civilized, productive, and just society (**Focus on Minorities**, p.35).

Educating One-Third of a Nation also points to minorities as a key to university and college survival. As the number of 18-24 year old whites declines, it is noted, institutions will have to turn to minorities if they wish to remain in business.

Diversity is also a key concept in **Educating One-Third of a Nation** as the report states, "institutions cannot be excellent without diversity" (p.8). Diversity is used in several ways. One is in approaching the curriculum,

> Conferees suggest requiring all students to take a course that exposes them to ideas and insights of many diverse cultures. Institutions should encourage faculty to include literature and research by minority scholars in their courses and to develop courses that examine social issues that emerge from living in a multicultural society (p.16).

The other use of diversity as a metaphor is in enlarging the pool of college-going minority students. The report claims that many institutions seek only the "top notch" minority students which means that these many institutions are fighting for few students. Institutions have developed methods of minority student recruiting, they simply choose to focus on the talented. By implication, this communicates that few minorities are qualified for higher education under current admission policies. **Educating One-Third of a Nation** offers little, however, in approaches to how to change the attitudes and behaviors of educators and policy makers in power that have maintained a homogenous student body and curriculum.

Which ideas are advanced as foundational to the discourse?

Both reports speak to the idea that minority students alone are not the beneficiaries of retention programs and that the general welfare of society is served. This also appears to legitimate the idea that these programs are necessary or useful if they assist white students as well as minorities. As **Educating One-Third of a Nation** explains,

> Programs that benefit all students, not only the minority community on campus, are particularly effective and garner much support (p.9).

Focus on Minorities cities Richardson, who found that as enrollments approach 20% for a specific minority group, minority programs become more integrated into the institutional culture. This implies that programs take on less of an appearance of having a special focus when minority enrollments reach proportional levels.

That minorities are underprepared for higher education is accepted as a given in the discourse. Words like "remedial," "unprepared, and "problems" are presented throughout the reports. **Educating One-Third of a Nation** states that, "institutions must focus on those students who are willing, able, but as yet unprepared to learn" (p.8) to accommodate minority students. One half of the institutions responding to a pre-conference survey indicated they offer one of more programs -- skills assessment, skills development, special counseling and advising, faculty mentoring, etc.-- for minority students.

Focus on Minorities sees this as a concern that higher education inherits and then must correct,

> Progress toward full participation of minorities in higher education is distressingly stalled. There are gaps which much be overcome, especially in academic preparation and retention to higher levels on the education ladder (p.33),
>
> Successful completion of a demanding, high-quality undergraduate curriculum is the key to minority success. This is why the states must, and have, put such great emphasis on collaborative

> work with the schools to improve academic preparation. This is why some states, far too few, have supported substantial remedial programs at the collegiate level in order not to lose the current generation of minority students (p.35).

It is a common theme in this discourse to blame elementary and secondary education for failing to prepare minority students adequately for higher education. Universities and colleges are thus, it is claimed, left with no other option but to develop remedial programs to aid in the achievement of minority students.

As has been discussed throughout this paper but is worth repeating, economic productivity is an issue that is treated as highly salient in discussing the participation and retention of minority students. The concern is less with educating minorities for the sake of equal educational opportunity, social justice or self-improvement, but rather the focus is on developing a skilled workforce.

State Level

Who is Authorized to Speak?

Our Common Commitment (OCC): Enhancing Ethnic Minority Integration and Achievement in Arizona Universities was published as **A Report and Recommendation of the Regents Ad Hoc Committee on University Access and Retention** in September 1989. The Arizona Board of Regents authorized a group of 32 individuals, prominent leaders in the state's universities, community colleges and state board of education, well-known community and business leaders, and state legislators, to write this report. The committee was chaired by the Chairwoman of the Arizona Board of Regents who is an active community leader. **OCC** is a state level policy document which attempts to link minority student recruitment and retention to the demographic, economic and cultural "revolutionary" growth of the state:

> During the past four decades few states have rivaled Arizona in terms of population, economic and cultural growth. Over the course of a single generation, our state's economy has evolved from one dependent on mining and agriculture to new dependence on high technology and service-related industries; a revolution that has propelled the state into a more competitive national position. (p.4)

OCC was intended to provide policy and practice guidelines and goals to the state's initiative in 1989, House Bill 2108, which authorized funding($2.5 million) to be applied to minority student access, recruitment and retention in the state's colleges and universities.

The **Texas Educational Opportunity Plan for Public Higher Education (TEOP)** covering the period from September 1989 to August 1994 was prepared by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board and the Advisory Committee on Educational Opportunity Planning.

> The plan was developed at the initiative of Governor William P. Clements Jr., following the expiration in 1988 of a federal plan in which the state voluntarily participated (p.1).

The original **Texas Equal Educational Opportunity Plan**, approved in 1983, was required by the Office of Civil Rights of the U.S. Department of Education which had found that higher education in Texas continued "to reflect the racial identity assigned by law to Texas public institutions prior to 1954" and found "additional vestiges of the formerly dual system are evident in inequities in resource allocations to the traditionally black and traditionally white schools..." (p.1). This report, the **Texas Educational Opportunity Plan (TEOP)**, incorporated and expanded the goals of the original 1983 policy initiative. As a state level policy document it is therefore comparable to the Arizona **OCC** plan and was issued during the same time period, 1989.

The **TEOP** was authorized by the Governor and prepared by a 10 member advisory committee working in collaboration with the staff of the Texas Coordinating Board. All ten

members of this advisory committee held high level administrative posts at Texas college and universities. No business or community leaders, or legislators were members of the advisory committee. The Chairman of this committee was a Hispanic President of one of the largest community colleges in the state.

An additional Texas state document **The Fifth Annual Narrative Report (FANR) on the Texas Equal Educational Opportunity Plan for Higher Education** covering academic year 1987-1988 was analyzed. It had been prepared and submitted by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board for Governor Ann Richards. This document reported statewide activities of Texas state colleges and universities on minority student issues. The case for the **OCC** policy initiative in Arizona however reflects similar disparities as in Texas between minority representation in the overall population and their presence in institutions of higher education.

Who Listens?

As **OCC** was commissioned by the Arizona Board of Regents (ABOR) it is possible to assume that ABOR members read it. This document was widely distributed to administrators and faculty at the three state universities and in the state's fifteen community college districts, legislators and community groups throughout the state.

The **TEOP** was disseminated by the Texas Coordinating Board according to the following directive:

> **This Texas Educational Opportunity Plan for Public Higher Education is applicable to the following Public Senior Public Universities and Systems Offices, Public Medical Schools and Health Centers, and Public Community Colleges (p.39).**

This included forty-two public senior universities and systems offices, eight public medical schools and health centers, and 77 community colleges, systems, and technical institutes.

The narrative report **(FANR)** was submitted to the Governor and presumably was a

reporting requirement to the U. S. Office of Civil Rights although this is not stated. The Coordinating Board for Texas College and Universities was also responsible for distributing this document. A targeted audience is not specified.

What Can Be Said?

The Arizona document states that the OCC committee was "charged to provide the Board with advice, critiques, evaluations and recommendations" regarding:

> a) The current inventory of recruitment and retention programs at each university designed to target under-represented student populations and assist in the achievement of baccalaureate, graduate and professional degrees.
> b) The comprehensive minority student recruitment and retention plans established at each university in accordance with and additional legislative allocation of $2.5 million for efforts to increase under-represented populations throughout the three universities.
> c) The implementation of the recommendations made by the Regent's Task Force on Excellence, Efficiency and Competitiveness concerning increased minority student recruitment and retention.
> d) The implementation of goals articulated at both systemwide and institutional levels.
> e) The relationship of financial aid and access opportunities for under-represented populations.
> f) Strategies for more effective university outreach efforts into Arizona's communities.
> g) Strategies for enhancing efforts in working with the Legislature to fund programs that address the commitments called for in this report.
> h) Formulation of a structure that provides an opportunity for ongoing dialogue with and advice to the Arizona Board of Regents. (p.2)

It proposes that minority student achievement can only be developed if the principle of "minority integration is employed at all levels of university life" (p.5) as a desirable goal. It further explains the need for:

> ...the development of an operational blueprint which articulate as its highest priority the recruitment and development of minority faculty, staff and administrators, and the recruitment and graduation of minority students in undergraduate and graduate programs. (p.5)

OCC further specified four sub-committees to study four general areas of inquiry which corresponded to the HB2108 directives: The Early Outreach Sub-Committee, the Recruitment Sub-Committee, the Retention and Graduation Sub-Committee, and the Accountability Sub-Committee. In addition to this issue, OCC also addresses ongoing dialogue issues and areas for future study.

The **TEOP** states:

> Equal educational opportunity is identified as a fundamental principle in the Texas Charter for Higher Education, adopted as state policy by the 70th Texas Legislature. This **Texas Educational Opportunity Plan for Public Higher Education** represents the state's comtinued and deepened committment to that principle. The plan attempts to specifically address the underrepresentation of blacks and Hispanics, relative to whites, in the Texas higher education system (p.1).

The **TEOP** objectives deal with seven areas of concern:

> Minority undergraduate recruitment, enrollment, and retention; minority student enrollment in graduate and professional schools; increased employment of minority faculty and staff; the enhancement of South Texas institutions; the continued enhancement of historically black institutions; recognition of other institutions with large minority enrollments; and minority representation on appointed governing boards (p.2).

The **FANR** states that it is reporting on the four goals of the original 1983 plan (p.2):

> (1) enhancement of programs and facilities at the two traditionally black institutions,
> (2) equal opportunity in recruitment, enrollment, and graduation of black and Hispanic students at all degree levels,
> (3) increased employment of black and Hispanic faculty and staff,
> (4) increased representation of black and Hispanics on systemwide and institutional governing boards. It also reiterates that this plan, as a "federally mandated plan established specific objectives under the equal access goal..." (p.2).

The **FANR** document states that progress has been limited "due to factors beyond the scope of the original plan" (p.2). The **FANR** document summarizes the objectives and actions taken during the five years of the plan.

OCC and the **TEOP** are comprehensive state policy plans and guidelines of which minority student issues are but one component. **OCC** emphasizes minority student issues, while the **TEOP** and **FANR** address other issues related to physical facilities, faculty and personnel. Both documents, **OCC** and **TEOP**, enumerate goals for a five year period, 1989-1994. The **FANR** is a summary report document. All three policy documents reflect and legitimate the demographic and economic exigencies which were noted as compelling forces in shaping the national policy documents.

What Remains Unspoken?

OCC frequently invokes the notion of maximizing the "strengths inherent in diversity" throughout the document, yet these strengths are not defined.

The **TEOP** links racial integration with cultural pluralism:

> There must be a continuing effort to increase both the numbers of minority students enrolled at institutions with predominantly white students and, vice versa, the numbers of white students at predominantly minority schools. The goal is greater integration at all the state's colleges and universities(and the Texas State Technical Institute)--certainly for the purpose of providing all people with equal opportunities, but also for the purpose of educating citizens to live in an increasingly interdependent, multicultural society. Student of all groups need exposure, through the curriculum and the campus life, to the concerns and contributions of other cultures. Integration reduces prejudice, increases tolerance, destroys stereotypes, and increases receptivity to what is unique in other cultures. Different cultures should be encouraged on campus, with the expectation that they will maintain their unique characteristics and thereby enrich the academic arena, as they do society itself (p.5).

Not one word or section of either **OCC** or the **TEOP** address curricular imperatives or student affairs initiatives to accommodate the "the concerns and contributions of other cultures" or the "inherent strengths of diversity." Not one word or section offers any information or strategy for the elimination of prejudice and stereotypes or the increase of tolerance and receptivity to diversity. How the expectation that different cultures will maintain their unique characteristics thereby enriching the academic arena while at the same time neglecting to address these fundamental issues of racism and culture remains a mystery. The policies promote the notion that the "benefits" of integration and diversity will somehow accrue and magically appear when increased numbers of students of color and underrepresented groups are physically present.

While the **FANR** rarely applies the terms of diversity or pluralism in its report, it speaks, for example, when referring to the traditionally black colleges, of making them "comparable" to white institutions with "similar missions." One is led to believe that much of this comparability of mission must refer to physical plant enhancements since much of the document

details this. However, when the document also states that the traditionally black institutions are experiencing decreasing enrollments of both black and Hispanic students, the question must be asked: Who are the expansions and enhancements serving? Certainly many institutional planners, private contractors, construction industries, lawyers, architects, administrators, potential faculty, etc, but to what end? This is especially problematic when the purpose of the enhancements was "to attract new students of all backgrounds." For what? To be as comparably good as the traditional white institutions who can't retain minority students either, or to put nicer surroundings around a dual system of education?

When the **FANR** states "due to factors beyond the scope of the plan" limited progress occurred, it primarily attributes this to "static minority enrollments." What is unsaid is how this could have been so unanticipated and how the plan failed to address it. There is no mechanism or structure for the analysis of failure.

What remains glaringly unsaid is how Arizona and Texas state level policy makers would anticipate failure and what structures, fall-back positions, or mechanisms would be in place to effectively deal with the structural breakdown of the plans and policy goals when some failure could have been predictable. In the face of an historical legacy of non-participation of minority students in higher education, it is puzzling if not alarming that such comprehensive planning tools by policy makers would be so naive or derelict as to not detail some minimal contingency plan or policy.

Lacking that foresight, these documents remain as the window-dressing of deeper political agendas which design plans of reaction rather than action which seem satisfied with stop-gap measures. They assume operating propositions of social justice and equity and collective and

individual good will. However, both **OCC** and the **TEOP** fail to identify any real incentives or disincentives for individuals or institutions to implement the objectives and goals specified. While **OCC** of Arizona established a specific Accountability Committee, it only serves a monitoring function. The **TEOP** simply details reporting requirements. Both plans articulate auspicious goals, but as Ingram and Mann (1980) remind us, auspicious goals are doomed to failure when measurement standards are not specified (p.30). Even though both the Arizona and Texas documents specify numerical increases in enrollments for minority students over a five period, no incentives or disincentives are specified in regard to those goals.

None of the documents address non-traditional students. While transfer and articulation programs with community colleges are described in all three documents, none of these policy documents weighs heavily to this vital and critical link for minority student access to four year and beyond degrees. The documents leave unsaid that nearly half of all minority students in the U.S. are enrolled in community colleges.

> By 1986 community colleges, with 37 percent of the total enrollment in American education, were enrolling over 47 percent of the ethnic minority student (Cohen and Brawer, p.41).

Yet the inclusion in the discourse of these documents of any substantive treatment of this available pool of minority students remains as peripheral in these policy documents as community colleges are marginal in the post-secondary hierarchy.

Which metaphors, modes of argumentation, explanation, and description are valued?

The metaphors, modes of argumentation, explanation and descriptions valued in the reports reveal the case for and against minority student retention.

OCC states that it is a "sad reality" that minorities do not "successfully traverse the path to high school graduation." Compassion is evoked rather than outrage at an unjust schooling

system failing its citizens. The document describes the state as having a "significant role," a "collective effort," a "challenge," which seek "creative approaches" to "mark a beginning, not an ending" in order "to enhance the likelihood" of graduating minorities. The metaphor of enhancement is also invoked frequently in the **TEOP** and **FANR** documents. To enhance is to make greater, as in value, desirability, or attractiveness. For Arizona, actually graduating minority students is not to be enhanced but the likelihood of that possibility. The value of higher education is presented as serving the states' interest as "it is being propelled into a more competitive national position" (p.4). Arizona universities are "well positioned" to ground the state in that competitive arena because,

> An outstanding university system is basic to the quality of our lives in Arizona (p.4).

The **OCC** document states,

> It is ironic that the focus on 'boon times' for Arizona university enrollments during the past twenty-five years has diverted attention away from the fact that a significant portion of our population, ethnic minority students, has not shared similar success in entering our universities and completing degree programs (p.4).

An irony is an incongruity between an actual result of a sequence of events and the normal and expected result. Apparently this irony has existed for twenty-five years. Obviously minorities had been around for the past twenty-five years since attention had been diverted to the 'boom times' instead, but seemingly it was noticed only recently that they were not in higher education. We can only imagine that in the frenzy of constructing the buildings to accommodate the exponential enrollment growth in the dry mountains and deserts of Arizona so much sand blew into the air that state policy makers had not noticed who was and who was not coming to school up to 1989.

In the **TEOP**, there is a sense of inherent stratification contained in the ideology of equal

educational opportunity. The plan proposes to "assure that all the people of Texas have an opportunity to participate in higher education at their highest achievable level, regardless of their race, ethnicity, or income" (p.1) "Highest achievable level" is linked to race, ethnicity and income; three areas in which contemporary U.S. and campus cultures are already highly stratified. The pursuit of "positive action" through "systematic adjustments...until relative parity is achieved" (p.1) not only disengages the Texas institutions from the level of real human interaction, but also contradicts the goal of equity by relegating it to a "relative" position. This plan and **OCC** further this relativistic notion of equity with a related metaphor, "proportional participation."

The **TEOP** is much more direct in describing the "Role of the State and the Institution" than **OCC**. This reflects not only the great range in the numbers and types of higher education institutions in both states but a fundamental difference in the relationship between state level policy makers and the institutions within each state. The great diversity and distinctiveness of Texas institutions (missions, sizes, locations) requires "multiple approaches" to equal educational opportunity. Therefore, each institution is "granted significant autonomy under this plan" (p.3) to tailor the policies and recommendations to their own situations. **OCC** simply states, "By December, 1989, the Board of Regents should receive action plans from each university to accomplish the recommendations outlined in this Committee report" (p.20).

These policy documents consistently reiterate many of the themes of minority student persistence referred to previously in this paper. High school drop-out rates, underpreparedness, financial aid, the need for remedial assistance, lack of role models and mentors, involvement of minority communities. In addition, both documents argue for early outreach (K-12)

interventions, campus immersion experiences and programs, and mention the need for stronger articulation agreements between two and four year institutions.

The major persistence themes of academic and social integration are embedded and valued in these plans even if the discourse in the documents does not present these themes as specific policy initiatives utilizing the same language. The word integration is most frequently used in reference to racial or cultural issues.

The arguments for minority student persistence in the discourse of these state level documents assume that academic and social integration can be expected to produce greater minority graduate rates by casting a wide net of special interventions designed to facilitate minority student adjustment to successful higher learning.

Which ideas are advanced as foundational to the discourse?

There are a number of areas where the discourse of **OCC**, the **TEOP** and the **FANR** reflect similar fundamental orientations.

These documents link higher learning inextricably to the quality of life of their states as the arbiters and pace setters of democracy and economic prosperity. Equal educational opportunity in higher education is a moral imperative which is coupled with economic prosperity. Failure to achieve proportional participation disavows our democratic heritage. "For the good of the individual and the welfare of the state, the educational system must take effective action" (**TEOP**, p.2).

These reports promote cultural diversity and racial integration as essential components of a higher education agenda for the 21st Century. They promulgate proportional representations of underrepresented student groups to white students as the optimum goal of equal educational

access and opportunity. What is not addressed is how this proportional representation should change when white students are no longer the majority, a shift which has already occurred in twenty-five of the nation's largest twenty-six public school districts.

The discourse in the documents also links the potential for success for underrepresented populations in higher education to partnerships with the K-12 schooling systems and minority communities. Outreach is proposed to shift attention to the elementary and secondary schools to restructure the educational pipeline in order to prepare the next generation of minority students with competitive skills for selective colleges, and they establish the white university structure as having a substantial role in and responsibility for that effort (Wilson, 1990). The theory of the educational pipeline is also foundational to the discourse examined in the Arizona and Texas documents.

Minority participation at the level of decision making is espoused quite differently. The Texas plans call for the examination of ways to include more minorities in state boards and governing bodies although the Texas report apologizes for the lack of minority community review of the document because,

> Although the constraint of time allotted to develop this plan precluded formation of and consultation with a community advisory committee, the plan will be distributed for comment by interested community groups (**TEOP-UTA**, p.viii).

OCC repeats at least twice that "the governor and members of the legislature, who are themselves members of minorities" (p.2) have provided the leadership for the Arizona initiative.

Also fundamental to this discourse is the contextualization of minority students as problematic. Outstanding minority student achievers are referred to in terms of being allured to other states who offer better financial support. The overwhelming reference to in-state minority

students who choose state institutions of higher learning, whether community colleges, state universities, or the "premier" institutions is in terms of the expectation for remediation and special educational services. This may be true for many minority students but the discourse does not acknowledge that this is also true for white students. When Arizona and Texas universities graduate only about fifty to sixty percent of all entering white students in five years, this suggests that remediation is not the exclusive domain of minority students. The discourse of these documents is imbued with the underlying theme of self-fulfilling prophecies in regards to minority student persistence until graduation. The **TEOP**, when it describes the remediation efforts which should be made available on all campuses, states, "Administrators and faculty should foster high expectations among themselves and all students for success." (p.5)

Perhaps the strongest ideas advanced as foundational to the discourse among the policy documents are institutional standards of excellence and quality. When the committment of the state to recruiting and retaining minority students is articulated, it is both directly and negatively related to institutional prestige and reputation.

> Arizona: The Committee is also adamant that there be no compromises in quality, in expectations or in qualifications as the universities seek to increase the number of minority students attending and graduating. Our universities and citizens must insist that high academic standards be met (OCC, p.19).

> Texas: The state committed itself to a continuing search for proven methods to increase minority enrollments and retention in its public institutions of higher education without injuring or eliminating reasonable standards for admissions, performance, and graduation. (**FANR**,p.43) The plan(the 1983 plan) specified that goals would be met without adopting quotas for specific groups or in any way lowering the standards for admission to, retention in, or graduation from Texas institutions (**FANR**, p.1).

It is hard to imagine that when the higher education discourse evolved for mainstream, white students such disclaimers were ever espoused.

Institutional Level

Who Is Authorized to Speak?

The **Texas Educational Opportunity Plan for Public Higher Education, 1989-1994, for the University of Texas at Austin (TEOP-UTA),** was prepared by the Office of the President of the University of Texas at Austin. The plan is "guided by the principle of equal educational opportunity" (p. iii) which was established in the Texas Charter for Higher Education and a goal of the Master Plan for Higher Education in Texas.

Assessing Minority Student Programs and Efforts, The University of Arizona, 1989-1990 was produced in the University's Center for Research on Undergraduate Education (CFR), a division within Undergraduate Academic Affairs. This report is to act as a supplement to annual mandated reports on minority students,

> "by describing in much greater detail the nature of the minority student body, by summarizing activities and effectiveness of our specific programs and other efforts to attract and retain minority students, and by describing our continuing work to assess and improve efforts on behalf of minority students" (p.2).

Who Listens?

There is no specific audience or dissemination strategy identified in the UT document. Presumably, the document was made available to all members of the UT community as well as members of the executive and legislative branches of state government, UT system campuses, and the people of Texas.

The audience for **Assessing Minority Student Programs and Efforts** is also unspecified. The University of Arizona reports to the Arizona Board of Regents on minority students annually in a mandated fashion. The CFR document abandons this mandated structure which "does not allow the University to address critical questions raised in... the Access Committee's **Our**

Common Commitment" (p.2). Presumably, the Arizona Board of Regents is not interested in the issues this institutional document presents, at least not in this format. Just who is to be served by this report is not clear. It may be a document strictly for inter-institutional purposes.

What Can Be Said?

> **The University's Educational Opportunity Plan discusses current programs supporting minority student education and also develops plans for program enhancements pertaining to (1) recruitment, enrollment, retention, and graduation of ethnic minority students in undergraduate, graduate, and professional degree programs; and (2) employment, retention, and advancement of ethnic minority and non-faculty professional staff (TEOP-UTA, p.iii).**

The **TEOP** for UT Austin is replete with quantitative data and narrative reports to the current status and development of program enhancements as stated above. A consistent format is utilized throughout the document. Eight of the ten chapters each contain two sections: A Statement of Current Conditions and an Action Plan. The Statement of Current Conditions is further divided into four sections: Existing Status, Current Programs, Multi-Cultural Programs, and Deficiencies. The Action Plan is subdivided also into four subsections: Institutional Initiatives, Applicability of Initiatives, Human and Fiscal Resources, and Standards for Measuring Progress. Chapters one through six address ethnic minority undergraduate student retention and graduation as aggregate issues with enrollment and graduation trends data and description of campus wide services and programs for minority students followed by separate chapters on minority enrollment in graduate school, minority enrollment in the graduate school of business, school of law, and teacher education programs. Chapters seven and eight address employment of ethnic minority faculty, and employment of ethnic minority non-faculty professional staff. The final two chapters address reporting requirements and a summary statement.

Assessing Minority Student Programs and Efforts begins by asking the question: What

are Arizona minority students like? A series of figures, by ethnic group, with brief explanations answer the following questions:

> -Are minority students Arizona residents or non-Arizona residents?
> -Are minority students full time or part time students?
> -How many minority students are transfer students? How many minority students transfer from Pima Community College?
> -What proportion of financial support goes to minority students?
> -What fields of study do minority students select?
> -Are minority students graduating in each major field?
> -Have graduation rates changed over time? (p.6)

The University of Arizona document also lists the more than 150 separate campus efforts that are aimed at recruiting and retaining minority students. These are programs that directly target minority students or programs that proportionately serve high numbers of minority students. These programs are categorized by the administrative unit within the University they are under-- student affairs, academic affairs, colleges, professional schools, etc.

How these separate programmatic efforts should be evaluated is also raised. Program responsibility lies with the individual program although the Center for Research on Undergraduate Education attempts to maintain a consistent evaluation format for the gathering of comprehensive data.

The overall assessment of minority recruitment and retention efforts is being approached in several ways, the report states. Two of those are mentioned:

> 1) the development of a longitudinal database that allows the tracking of all students on campus irrespective of program participation,
> 2) the administration of student surveys, distributed to virtually all students on campus (p.32).

In approaching minority student retention specifically, three comprehensive questions are asked (p.34):

> 1) How many of the total number of minority students at Arizona participate in a minority student program?
> 2) Are there overlaps in minority student participation?

3) How do these students compare to students who do not participate?

The data presented indicate that those minority students (14% of total enrollment) who participate in programs often participate in more than one program, that 30% of Arizona's minority students participate in at least one program, and that African-Americans (43%) participate with the greatest frequency followed by Hispanics (28%), American Indians (28%) and Asian Americans (19%). Program participants tend to enter the University with higher SAT scores and high school GPAs than non-participants, however, ACT scores and high school rank are similar for both groups. First semester UA GPAs are similar for both groups, but program participants tend to complete more units.

Student feedback also forms a part of the CFR document. Student feedback surveys are distributed to many program participants. This report highlights two questions concerning institutional services most important to students and those most needed. Financial aid, advising, and academic skills were reported as both most important and most needed.

Two strategies, both identified in **Our Common Commitment**, for future direction in The University of Arizona's efforts to recruit and retain minority students are presented. These are to increase student feedback and further identify students at risk of withdrawal. These issues are being addressed through the development of a longitudinal data file and from information supplied by minority student program directors.

What Remains Unspoken?

Lower quality K-12 educational experiences, greater need for financial support, hostile living and learning environments, and racist behavior which "diminishes both victim and perpetrator alike" (**TEOP-UTA**, p.iv) are cited as the main causes of lower college-going,

persistence, and graduation rates among ethnic minority students in the **TEOP-UTA** report. Two of these "main causes," hostile living and learning environments, and racist behavior, are never addressed in the document. Cultural diversity and pluralism are avoided as distinct topics for discussion in the document, but the "Multi-Cultural Programs" sections of most of the chapters include descriptions of ethnic studies centers and programs, special minority recruiters and educational services, library collections and special events, speakers and presenters to highlight culturally related topics and events.

The forward to **Assessing Minority Student Programs and Efforts** states,

> we believe that only when efforts to support minority students are woven into our ongoing academic and student programs will they truly become integrated, constituent elements of our overall University programs. We believe that under these conditions these efforts will have the greatest likelihood of success (p.2).

however, the report does not appear to treat the programs as integrated but rather as special additions.

Aside from talking about efforts to recruit and retain minority students, the CFR document ignores a sense of institutional goals, objectives, and purposes. Why these efforts should be undertaken in the first place is taken as a given. While that may be an ideal, the reality is that whatever audience this report is intended for, in all likelihood, may not share in that understanding. The authors appear to have a thorough sense of what is going on at The University of Arizona; they fail to articulate any sense of why (other than a statewide mandate). Which metaphors, modes of argumentation explanation, and description are valued?

Both the Executive Summary and the Introduction to the **TEOP-UTA** document link the increase of minority graduates from Texas institutions of higher learning to the diminishing of the "troublesome" aspects of racism and hostile living and learning environments in the society

at large. How this will occur is never made explicit but remains as the expectation and anticipated spill over effect of increasing minority student and faculty inclusion in higher education.

Democratic intention is reiterated as a compelling motive to provide equal educational opportunity to all the people of Texas at their highest achievable level. The interest and concern regarding underrepresented groups is directed by the "conjuncture of demographic change and continuing failure to educate people of color to their highest achievable level" **(TEOP-UTA,** p.iii).

Television, print media and scholarly studies are cited as providing almost daily reminders of the imperative for an economically, socially, and politically strong Texas and America in 1990's, the 21st Century and beyond. Universities must produce an enlightened citizenry and a skilled, flexible and internationally competitive workforce.

As evidenced by the numerous qualitative and quantitative descriptions of resources and services for special educational programs and remedial interventions replicated in distinct departments and programs reported throughout the two university documents, the doctrine of deficit and disadvantaged minority cultures continues to drive the design of recruitment, enrollment and retention programs.

The UA document also relies heavily on the theories of academic and social integration in discussing minority student retention. This explains the heavy emphasis on a programmatic approach to the issue.

> **Since student persistence is known to be influenced by students' involvement in campus social and academic life, the increase in these rates (persistence) through time may well reflect the University's efforts in both academic and student affairs to increase minority student involvement (p.19).**

Assessing Minority Student Programs and Efforts does make significant attribution to **Our Common Commitment**, indicating that the state report does influence discourse at the institutional level. The themes of **Our Common Commitment**, however, are not fully developed and linked to programs at the University. The mode of explanation is one of reporting a series of tables to answer the questions listed earlier or to indicate the activities and participation rates of various programs. Little substantive discussion is included. The **TEOP-UTA** document also links its responsibility for minority student programs to the federal equal educational and employment mandates of 1983 which were "voluntarily accepted" by the state the state and its post-secondary institutions.

Ideas Advanced as Foundational to the Discourse

The UT plan reinforces many of the foundational ideas discussed under state policies. The principles of equal educational opportunity, the notions of educational pipelines, the welfare of society advanced through individual intellectual growth and minority group participation, the university as the pace setter for economic competitive edge and cultural cohesion, maintaining standards of excellence and quality--all of these are fundamental to this discourse about minority student persistence.

For both UA and UT, the theories of academic and social integration, academic underpreparedness, mentors, tutors, and role models are also embedded in the litany of special educational and affective support services the university is providing or intends to provide.

The framework on equity of employment opportunity is also an integral component of this discourse:

> Equity in faculty and non-faculty staff employment opportunities guides institutional hiring practices. Beyond that, however, it is time for the voices of ethnic minority historians,

> philosophers, scientists, artists, lawyers, engineers, architects, accountants, journalists, and their perspectives on the important issues of our day to be heard in the classrooms and administrative offices of our institutions (**TEOP-UTA,** p.iv).

The UT document places a value to the timeliness of equity considerations. A value, obviously, which has only recently emerged as desirable and positive.

The CFR document also devotes significant attention to financial aid as a key factor in minority student recruitment and retention.

> One issue raised in Our Commitment is that financial support is vital to minority students... Indicators of financial support for minority students include the percentage of financial aid recipients who are minority students, the percentage of available money awarded to minority students, and the ratio of gift aid to self help aid that minority students receive (p.12).

In what ways and to what extent financial aid is relevant to these students is unknown and unexplored. Any substantial discussion of need-based financial aid is avoided.

Conclusions: Whose Interests Are Being Served?

This content analysis of retention policies has moved us beyond explaining why retention programs with discreet academic or social variables fail minority students and fail to promote their retention. This study has made explicit why the current policy discourse protects and reproduces itself at the expense of minority students.

While the policies addressing minority student retention appear to be formulating and promoting flexible and innovative initiatives adjusting to the needs of minority students, they are not. They leave intact a fundamental ideology of cultural deficit and disadvantage, and support existing power arrangements. They leave intact an against-all-odds framework for minority student success.

Minority students are to overcome all the alleged limitations of their backgrounds while

somehow maintaining the richness and uniqueness of their cultural heritage to: 1) contribute, simply by their presence, to the cultivation of a culturally pluralistic, diverse, tolerant and accepting academic and social environment and campus climate; 2) embody the promise and future of a highly trained and professional workforce which can serve the competitive needs of society and the state, and 3) get a degree-while not detracting from the standards of excellence and prestige of their institutions.

The policies legitimate incremental changes to the status quo rather than advocate its real change, that is the substantive empowerment of underrepresented populations in American higher education. This is primarily accomplished largely by what remains unspoken in the policy documents which we have identified. Two significant omissions symbolize how these policies maintain peripheral rather than promote substantive and innovative directions in the retention of minority students. Not to address substantive curricular revisions, and the nature of the teaching-learning process serves to reproduce racism and intolerance legitimating the current standards of excellence post-secondary institutions uphold as neutral and color blind. Not to address the fundamental, pivotal issues of racism and academic and economic stratification guarantees their continued reproduction while only peripheral changes occur.

Our analysis shows that policy reports addressing minority student retention across various levels do influence and reflect one another. They address the same topics (e.g. economic and state interests, demographic information, diversity), use similar metaphors (e.g. equal opportunity, academic and social integration, enhancement), and advance the same ideas as foundational to the discourse (e.g. unpreparedness, whites also benefit, proportional representations) while failing to acknowledge the critical issue of racism, both in government and

on campus, and how it affects the attitudes and tolerance of those in positions of prominence.

What is evident in the policy discourse surrounding minority student retention is that existing power relationships go unchallenged. Discourse and access to it remain in the hands of those already in power, who show no signs of allowing alternative views an audience within the policy arena. While claiming to serve the needs of minority students, these authors real intentions are revealed to be those of serving their own needs, in the business community and by protecting existing state and institutional structures. By focusing on official policy discourse regarding minority student retention, a critical pragmatic approach to understanding this issue demonstrates that the actual retention of minority students is secondary to other agendas.

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